



# PARENT TOOLKIT

## *Winding Down After School*



Many children—especially those who are neurodivergent or experience anxiety—use a huge amount of energy and self-control during the school day. By the time they get home, their nervous system may be tired, overloaded, or dysregulated.

This can show up as: meltdowns or emotional outbursts; irritability or anger; withdrawal or silence; hyperactivity; refusing homework or routines.

This is often called “after-school restraint collapse.”

Your child has been holding things together all day and finally releases that tension when they feel more able.

### Why Regulation After School Matters

A short regulation period helps children:

- release built-up stress
- reset their nervous system
- transition from school expectations to home life
- prepare for homework, dinner, and bedtime routines

Without this time, children may stay in a **state of overwhelm** for the rest of the evening.

### Provide a Decompression Period

Give your child **20–40 minutes with no demands** after school.

During this time:

- avoid questions about school
- avoid homework immediately
- allow quiet or preferred activities

Examples:

- watching a familiar show
- reading
- drawing
- building toys or Lego
- quiet play

This helps the nervous system settle.

### **Offer Movement to Release Stress**

Many children need physical movement to regulate.

Helpful activities:

- jumping on a trampoline
- swinging
- riding a bike or scooter
- climbing or playground play
- dancing to music

Movement helps the body release built-up tension.

### **Create a Calm Environment**

School environments are often loud and stimulating.

At home, try:

- dim lighting
- quiet music
- reducing background noise
- providing a calm corner or safe space

This helps sensory systems recover.

### **Use Sensory Regulation Tools**

Some children regulate better with sensory input.

Examples:

- weighted blanket or lap pad
- fidget toys

- soft textures
- chewing tools
- warm bath or shower

Observe what helps your child relax.

### **Connect Before Asking Questions**

Many children need **emotional connection before conversation**.

Try:

- sitting together
- sharing a snack
- cuddling or gentle touch (if the child likes this)
- quiet time side by side

Once regulated, children are more able to talk.

### **Signs Your Child Is Beginning to Regulate**

You may notice:

- slower breathing
- calmer body movements
- increased communication
- willingness to engage

This is a good time to begin evening routines or homework.

The school day requires a lot of energy, attention, and self-control. Providing time and support to regulate after school helps children reset, recharge, and feel ready for the rest of the evening.